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Hardern, Frank

Inaugural address  
delivered at the...1899

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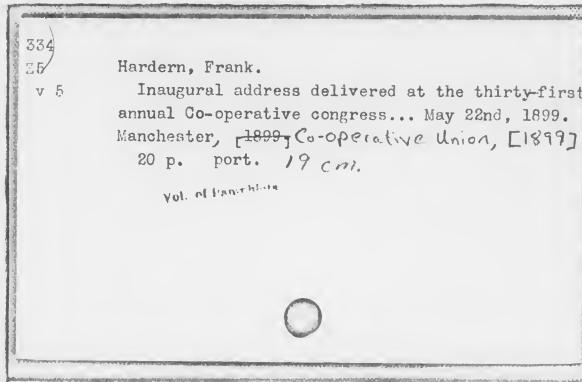
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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL

## Co-operative Congress,

HELD AT LIVERPOOL, MAY 22nd, 1899.

BY

MR. FRANK HARDERN, J.P.

(OF OLDHAM).



ISSUED BY  
THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED, LONG MILLGATE,  
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FRANK HARDERN, J.P.

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FRANK HARDERN J.P.

CO-OPERATIVE CONGRESS, 1899.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

*Delivered at the Thirty-first Annual Co-operative Congress,  
held at Liverpool, May 22nd, 1899.*

BY MR. FRANK HARDERN, J.P.

(OF OLDHAM).

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MANy and brilliant are the names of those who have honoured our movement in the past by giving the inaugural address at our annual Congresses; but to my mind, without wishing to draw any invidious distinctions, the names of those shine out the brightest who were the humblest, and who spent a lifetime and a life's work in helping and striving to develop the true principles of co-operation. No heroes of modern or ancient times can have, or will be entitled to, brighter crowns of laurel than those men who bore the heat and burden of the day, or who, in other words, laboured hard and long when the working classes of this country were struggling in the slough of despond, and who never rested until a brighter day began to shine and was permanently assured to the great democracy of this United Kingdom. Let us never forget, then, the life history of those self-sacrificing men who, in the past, and in the present, too, have sacrificed their all on the altar of truth, justice, and right.

You have come to another of these Congresses—the thirty-first—held this year in the second largest maritime city in the world. In the name of the reception committee, I give you a hearty and generous welcome to

Liverpool. We hope this Congress will record two things. The first of those two you have already fulfilled; the second is in the balance, and depends upon the individual effort of every delegate present. You have made this Congress the largest; make it also the best. You can do it if you like. These Congresses now are undoubtedly the leading feature in our movement; they enable us to meet together for the general benefit of all. By their means we are enabled to record our progress in the past, and take hope for the future. The Congress is the legislature of co-operation; it enables us to deliberate and administrate on all matters concerning the machinery of our constitution. These are the occasions when we can meet each other face to face, exchange ideas, correct the mistakes and errors of the past, and try to solve the problems of the present, thus preparing ourselves for the difficulties that may beset us. There is no doubt of the usefulness of these Congresses; their continual growth in numbers and interest proves their inestimable value to the whole of the societies in the Union. In a great number of these meetings you have a specific object in view, some desire to fulfil.

It is only right I should remind you why you came here. I don't intend to let you forget the why and the wherefore. As a rule, we have gone to places where there have been some co-operative attractions, either local or sectional. Here there are practically none. Liverpool has been described as a co-operative desert, with four poverty-stricken societies. I am pleased to say that during the past year these four societies have been amalgamated into two, and the word "poverty" dropped out, let us hope, for ever. You were very much tempted at Peterborough; you were in the same position as described in that well-known rhyme of "The Spider and the Fly." Several spiders wanted you to "walk into their parlour;" they promised you all manner of

good things, but you were not to be tempted. I dare not follow the moral of the story further, because I hope at some not very distant date you will walk into the parlours of the other spiders. If you do, I am inclined to think the action of the story will be somewhat altered; instead of the spider devouring the flies, you (the flies) will devour the spider. But you have come to the desert; let your visit leave behind it a little leaven that, in the course of time, will leaven the whole lump. We have had deserts to deal with before, but, our principles prevailing, we have turned them into beautiful gardens of prosperity. The whole of our country a little over fifty years ago was a desert—a dull, monotonous, dreary place, a blank, if you like—with not a single line of colour to relieve it. The social reformers of old could not see the slightest oasis in sight. But they began to have some faith in the future. Not a dead faith—an idle, listless, helpless faith—but an active, energetic faith, that told them as plainly as words possibly could that their faith must be accompanied with works—good works, if you like, but something must be done. The result was that the mustard seed was sown; the smallest of all seed went down into the earth. The faith of the sowers watered the ground. They performed their good works.

Leaders of mankind, with precepts loudly heard,  
Let your working bind example with your word;  
Let fair intention move the heart to do its best,  
And little, wrought in love, is good work great and blest.

I know you will say that I am treading on beaten track—a path well-trod before. Yes, that is so; but you will not, I am sure, deny me the pleasure of recapitulating what has been done by associated effort. Year by year our statistical account gives forth our record and development, and it is to our interest that these should be given us in as accurate a manner as possible. It is to the interests of every individual society

that this table handed to you for comparison should be a truthful reflex of our actual position. So far the statement has shown a steady increase, a constant growth, which is most encouraging to us all. This year's figures are no exception to the rule. In every detail we have given us there is something of a congratulatory character. The growth is slow and steady—too slow for some of us, perhaps—but still steady and sure, and this ought to give us all at least some satisfaction. We cannot see the increase so much year by year as we can decade by decade. Let us, for comparison, take a decade ago, in order to get a more emphatic view of progress. I take the figures presented to us in Congress report for 1889 for the year 1888, and we get the following result:—

	1888	1889	Increase
Societies .....	1,464	1,640	176—12 per cent.
Members.....	992,428	1,046,078	653,650—66 "
	£	£	£
Shares .....	10,393,394	19,759,039	8,365,645—80 "
Sales .....	36,735,045	65,460,871	28,725,826—75 "
Profits .....	3,414,407	7,165,753	3,751,346—109 "
Investments .....	5,313,923	11,681,296	6,367,373—120 "

I think you will agree with me that those figures are very striking, and in the most essential points, too. Not an extraordinary increase in societies, but in members, capital, sales, profits, and investments, sufficient to satisfy the most jealous observer of our movement. When we make a similar comparison in regard to Wholesale trading, we find a still more striking result:—

	1888	1889	Increase
Members.....	1,105	1,630	525—47.5 p.c.
	£	£	£
Capital, share and loan	1,326,721	3,252,176	1,925,455—145 p.c.
Sales .....	8,169,894	17,267,078	9,097,184—111 p.c.
Profits.....	137,367	445,578	308,211—224 p.c.

A marked increase in the number of societies, and most gratifying in capital, sales, and profits, sufficient, I am sure, to satisfy my enthusiastic friend Mr. Maxwell, and my steady-going, but nevertheless sanguine, friend Mr. Shillito. The sales in the productive departments of

these two gigantic institutions increased in ten years from £298,040 to £2,739,655—a jump of 819 per cent, an advance of more than eight times over. These two institutions, growing up side by side—yea, more than that, practically locked in each other's embrace—associated together, as they are, in so many undertakings, are undoubtedly the great bulwarks of our united effort. How important it is that our united intelligence and our best efforts and energies should be put forward to conserve the best interests of what really is the backbone of co-operation in the United Kingdom.

I cannot pass from these tables of comparison without noticing our steps forward in production. Some years ago we were considerably disturbed year after year at our gatherings with respect to the principles or practice which prevailed, or did not prevail, in our methods in production. Both sides struggled very tenaciously to gain what they considered was their point. Whilst this contention lasted, we seemed to lose sight of progress, if there was any at all. In course of time, I am glad to say, wiser counsels prevailed. Conciliation came into the arena and intervened, and eventually we tacitly agreed to differ, and to each go our own way, and let time—that grand old arbitrator—settle the matter. And so now it is a pleasure to note that production grows apace. In the same way as before, I give the comparative figures, leaving out the two Wholesales:—

	1888	1889	Increase
Societies ..	76	147	71—93 per cent.
Members ..	23,309	31,890	8,581—36 "
	£	£	£
Shares .....	529,015	788,456	259,441—49 "
Sales .....	1,706,909	2,901,680	1,194,771—70 "
Profits .....	30,699	166,268	85,572—106 "

Whilst better, no doubt, can be done, this progress is most assuring, and gives us hope for the future. We must admit, however, that our productive report is far from brilliant. No doubt the committee have done all

they could with what they had at their command, and were undoubtedly prepared to do more. Their best efforts have been given to create a new stimulus in those societies requiring assistance and support. There is still a grand field open, and with care and caution, there is ample opportunity and scope for an energetic committee.

We must all feel proud at the vigorous efforts being put forth by our Committee on Education. I dare not stay to attempt to analyse a report which seems full to overflowing. There is plenty of work set out for you to do if you will do it. You cannot possibly complain of the fare offered when such a varied dish is set before you. The menu is of the very best, there is plenty of it, and I am sure we all have the greatest admiration for such a display of what positively must, if taken hold of by the societies in the spirit in which it is given, do good. There is only one remark I should be disposed to offer, and that is given in the kindest spirit imaginable. I mention it here in order to justify, to some extent at least, what I have to recommend to you hereafter later on in this humble address. The late General Secretary (Mr. E. V. Neale) summed our movement up in two words—moral and economical. And I think you will admit that no words could be more appropriate or more in order. The first—“moral.” Let us begin by teaching the morality of our work, the necessity for a fundamental change in our social life—a change from that system which makes a millionaire on one hand and a pauper on the other; to make man a better man, a better citizen. Secondly—“economical.” To teach the justice and right of it. We are proud of how much we have done towards a more equitable distribution of wealth. How many are chasing this will-o’-the-wisp? We want to teach men that there is something higher and nobler than this rush after gold; to teach the world that our principles are right constitutionally; to introduce an order of things

that will be a decided improvement on the present—in short, we can morally make man a better man, and economically the State a better State. I have already said the educational food is of the very highest—so high and so rare is some of the dish that we are advised to go to Oxford and Cambridge to take it. The all-pervading question with me is whether it is not too high, and whether a great deal of what we suggest is not too rich, and whether something of a plainer kind would not serve our purposes. To put it as plain as I possibly can, whether the system or programme of education offered is not of too high an order for the rank-and-file that we want to get at, and whether a plainer and more elementary kind would not bring about what we all desire—a more loyal, and true, and earnest body of members than we have at the present. Say what we will, our most important duty is education, and there is plenty of scope for the most vigorous efforts. Notwithstanding all that has been done, more remains yet untouched; 55 per cent of the total number of societies do not devote anything as yet to education.

There is another educational work sprung up in our midst—our Women’s Guild. They are, no doubt, doing a good work. I have watched their numbers grow with pleasure, and if their influence for good and their usefulness grow in proportion, we shall see a marvellous record some day. Give them a helping hand wherever you can. If you don’t like them, don’t hinder them. But if you admire the efforts put forth by them to help you in your work, then you will encourage them. I say to the ladies, heartily and sincerely, God speed and prosper your work.

We are making steady progress. All over the horizon of our movement the sun of prosperity is throwing its beams of gladness, and making us so to feel that our “lives have fallen in pleasant places, and that we have

a goodly heritage." If we could but have more faith and trust in each other, if we would but awake, if we would but don the self-sacrificing armour of the old pioneers, if we would but be imbued with the same enthusiasm, how much more could we do than we have done? We have registered our right to stay; we have justified our existence here in the present by the past. But if we would lay fast hold of the principles that govern our movement, be guided by truth, justice, and equity in all our actions, we could soon leaven the whole lump. Fifty years ago there were two classes widely divergent from each other—the rich and the poor. It is rather paradoxical to say it, but it is nevertheless true, the one was fattening on the other; the poor were being made poorer, and they had to be satisfied with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But the old pioneers set out with the determination that wealth should be more equitably distributed and more justifiably obtained. In the early days of the present century, and in even many instances yet, it was a question of

Get ye money, no matter how, no questions of the rich I trow,  
Stead by night and steal by day, but do it all in a legal way.

The social reformers saw the necessity and desirability of correcting this state of things, and never tired in their labours till the silver lining made its way through the dark cloud of ignorance and error; and men began to see that by association, union, and education, the steps to redemption were at hand. A movement that has distributed nearly 100 millions sterling in the lap of the worker is worthy of being recognised as one of the great levers of modern times to ameliorate the condition of society at large.

The general progress of our movement, both in distribution and production, as set forth in our report to Congress, is very gratifying, not, perhaps, altogether what some of us would like. I daresay we are over anxious. We

cannot be expected to progress in the same proportion as we did some years ago. With a few exceptions, the ground is well covered, the deserts are dying out; the fertilising influences are at work. There are times when I think a danger lurks behind it all; we do not work with that enthusiasm as we did of old. We are surrounded with privileges and opportunities that have been dearly bought for us. There does not seem to be the same anxiety for reform in the future as there has been in the past. There is a tendency to "rest and be thankful," to sit down and fold our arms with a satisfaction begotten of peace and plenty, without constantly keeping before us that the battle is far from won. It is all very well to rejoice, to shout with joy, and triumph at what you have done, and even to be satisfied at what you are doing. But what of the future? There is a great responsibility resting upon us all; are we doing all that can possibly be expected of us? You that are assembled here at this Congress to-day, have you done all that can possibly be expected of you? We hear a great deal about want of loyalty. Have you settled that question with yourselves? Are you being true to your principles? If you are not, you are not worthy of the trust reposed in you, of the confidence of your fellow-men.

I have a yearning and a longing desire to present to you in this address an appeal for a decisive course of action in the future, to lay something down in your midst that can be taken up with earnestness and enthusiasm by all of us. What would be the use of my criticising your past action as embodied in this report if I were not prepared to put something before you that is worthy of your most serious thought and action? We are very proud of boasting and quoting our numbers, and the extent of our various businesses, and their constant growth, but I am inclined to think, from experience of a large society—one of the largest for a number of years—

that the growth of our numbers comes more particularly from the respectable and better-to-do working class of our cities and towns. There is a vast population that practically we have not touched, that are, as yet, outside the pale of the movement. They ought to be in; we have never seemed to get hold of them; there is every reason why we should; there is every reason why they should taste the sweets of our principles; there is every reason why we should strive to bring them in the fold. There is a lot of nonsense talked about our goods being too dear for the very poor. It is quite true the respectable working-man is quite a connoisseur in the matter of choice. "Pure and unadulterated" is his cry, but he wants his goods cheap as well. We must get hold of the poorer classes. It is our duty to go into the highways and byways and gather them in. Heaven knows there is little sunshine in their lives, but they are our brethren, we are their keepers, and the course we ought to pursue is to give them the hand of sympathy and kindness, to let them know that they can share in these good things. Let our duty then be, my friends, to throw off the stigma that lies on our shoulders—that we do not care for our poorer brethren. I hear something of emergency funds; let there be *urgency* funds started at once. It is not true that "poverty parts good company." Co-operation has an adaptability for the poorest of the poor and for the richest of the rich. May we then register a vow that Liverpool shall be the meeting at which we will determine upon this point—that no slum, however dark, no home, however miserable, shall be left untouched. You can carry the light of brighter days; you can take a cheering ray, and lift many a saddening heart up to see and to know that there are brighter days in store. It is all a question of our being able to quicken, to bring to life, that spark of human brotherhood that exists in every breast. Here is work for all; every man and woman can be a teacher

an advocate, a missionary to take the glad tidings, and there is no doubt if we work with a will during the coming year we shall be able to report a good harvest to the next Congress.

Another question of most vital importance it is necessary I should bring before you. I feel impelled to do so by the experience I have had upon a committee of my own section. I know of no question of more urgent importance if we would maintain the integrity of our constitution, and that is the question of "overlapping." It is essential to the best interests of us all that this question should be grappled with. We shall not be worthy of the name of co-operators if we do not find some means of destroying a cankerworm which is gnawing at the very vitals of our constitution. Whether we look at it personally or constitutionally, I am sure we shall conclude that every legitimate means ought to be used to remove such a dangerous microbe from our midst. This is one of those questions that proves to us that our greatest danger comes from within, and not from without. I leave it with confidence in your hands. There are a number of poor deluded people outside who are trying to make themselves believe that these dissensions in our midst will bring about a break-up; but, thanks to your intelligence, so far they have been disappointed. So long as you are true to that spirit of the past that has brought and landed you where you are, outsiders may as well go and try, like old Mother Partington, to sweep the ocean back with a broom, or like the poor Scotchman, who tried to eat his porridge with a needle.

Another question I would like again to bring before your notice, which was so eloquently and intelligently introduced to you two years ago at Perth by my esteemed friend Mr. Maxwell. That is the growing necessity for our taking a deeper interest, and some share in the

representation on the various public bodies in the country from the House of Commons downwards. I maintain, and I think you will agree with me, too, that co-operation has had more to do with the amelioration that has taken place in this century than any movement of modern times. By our principles, we have inculcated thrift and industry. We have done all this, and brought about an evolution in industrial life without clamouring at the door of the House of Commons. The only thing we have sought has been a fair field and no favour. We have got the field, but we do not get the fairness at all times nor the favour. We have built up a State without State help, but if we are not careful the State will mar our building. We are governed by a legislature filled by so-called representatives of the people (oftener so-called than actual). Since our Government is of the most democratic character all the way through, from the central institution down to the simplest urban council in the smallest village of the Kingdom, and since we represent a sixth at least of the population of this country, to my mind there is the strongest reason why we should take our part and our share in the government of the country, and make our principles felt and known from the floor of the House of Commons, and through every municipality and council. I know I am treading on tender ground, but it is only right that I should try to put the matter clearly before you at this Congress. There seems to be a feeling whenever this question is introduced that it is a question of politics—of party politics. We have no politics, at least, no party politics; and yet our principles are the grandest in the catalogue of political economy. On the same ground we have no religion, only the grandest religion of all—the religion taught by the Carpenter of Nazareth, when he said, "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you." I am getting tired of party political strife, and I

feel somewhat ashamed of our intelligence as working-men when we see some of the finest social questions of the time shuttlecocked and battledored by first one party and then the other. To my mind, it is no credit to us that education—the birthright of the people—should be subject to the exigencies of party politics. As co-operators, we ought to take our share of every form of government in the country, not as Conservatives or Liberals, but as men—aye, and women, too—desirous of erecting a standard of future development that shall benefit every class of the community. Is it not a national disgrace that in many instances we have had to obliterate from our school-books the teaching of temperance, thrift, and industry, for fear we should trench upon the interests of certain sections of the community? Take my own town as an example. In the Parliamentary borough the lowest possible estimate gives us considerably over 50 per cent of the population as co-operators, and yet we have not a single direct representative on either council, school board, or board of guardians. However, you have discussed this matter in the past, and it will come under your notice again. May I ask you to discuss it on its broadest lines, remembering that we are constantly having to go with "bated breath and whispering humbleness" soliciting the protection of your rights and property.

For some time now the political world has been exercised over the question of old-age pensions, and all sorts of arguments and proposals have been made as a kind of a solution to the difficulty. I would have preferred myself that this should have been one of those subjects that social reformers should have settled amongst themselves. Some of the most absurd suggestions have been thrown out. We all admit that if there is any time of life when peace and contentment should reign supreme, it is when we are in the sere and yellow

leaf, and when our declining years and strength remind us that we are no longer able to fight the battle of life. Why, sirs, we have been solving the problem of pensions for many years past, and the world will never know how many thousands have enjoyed the pensions under our co-operative scheme. It can be demonstrated—and that very simply, too—how a working-man, with the usual family surroundings, commencing life, say, at twenty-five, capitalising the dividend from his purchases at the stores, taking the average purchase per head and dividend per pound, in less than twenty-five years can do something more than provide a return of 5s. per week at sixty-five years of age. Our friends the Co-operative Insurance Society Limited, in addition to the very useful functions they already perform, will be pleased, I am sure, to render every assistance to make your own pensions rather than the State should make another step towards clothing, feeding, and housing you.

You are to be complimented upon your relations with kindred bodies and institutions, particularly with our trades union friends. The last few years have brought us much closer together, and consequently we understand each other much better. I attribute a great deal of this better feeling to the men they have sent to join us in our deliberations, and to none more so than to Mr. W. Inskip (the chairman), who, since our report was issued, has passed over to the great majority. His loss will be keenly felt. He was a powerful personality in his own body. We shall lose a gentleman and a friend to our movement, whose impartiality and fair-mindedness, so admirably supported by everyone of his colleagues, endeared him to everyone with whom he came in contact. I hope you will take an early opportunity of recording your sympathy with the family and the movement, to whom Mr. Inskip's death will mean so much.

May I just briefly, but nevertheless sincerely, draw your attention to the growing relationship with our friends in foreign countries. From the Continent of Europe, America, India, and several other parts of the world, are constantly coming cordial greetings and requests for help and guidance. We are apt to think, you know, that we are the only co-operators, that, like the tailors of Tooley Street, "We are the people." If you have studied the statistical work issued by the International Co-operative Alliance during the past year—a work compiled by the liberality of a Continental co-operator, Count de Chambrun—you will see at once that co-operation is making great headway in the world. Whilst noting this, it is sad that we have to record the death of the noble count, whose time and talents and wealth were liberally expended in order to spread the principles of co-operation amongst his humbler brethren. The world and the people in it can ill afford to lose such liberal-hearted benefactors.

So, my friends, you see now this mustard seed has grown, till thousands—aye, tens of thousands, and millions—are sheltered under its branches. We none of us can tell of its possibilities in the future. The nineteenth century has seen its growth and steady development. Its possibilities are like the Promised Land to the Israelites of old. Take down the walls of difficulty—consisting of our want of loyalty, our jealousies and prejudices, our want of faith and trust in each other—and there lies disclosed beyond a land overflowing with milk and honey. The duty and responsibility upon each one of us cannot be too highly estimated. Every advance we make, every step forward we go, every platform of success we achieve, ought to make us more determined to strive to be equal to the occasion. In the past men sacrificed themselves for the amelioration of their race. Are you prepared to follow in their steps? The enemy

is trying in every conceivable way to find a rift in your armour, a break in your ranks. It is our bounden duty, as possessing such a valuable heritage, to see to it that we do not mar its value, but by the sincerity and earnestness of our enthusiasm, by the enlargement of our ideals, make it a more glorious heritage still. We are custodians of the present, handed to us by the past, and our duty is to increase its lustre and hand it on to the future.

Art is long, and time is fleeting,  
And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouacs of life,  
Be not like dumb-driven cattle,  
But be heroes in the strife.

Trust no future, how'er pleasant!  
Let the dead past bury its dead!  
Act, act in the living present,  
Heart within and God o'erhead.

When you traverse the streets of this busy city, and visit the many places of interest, all reminding you of the greatness of our national institutions, and impressing you with the possibilities of our glorious civilisation, be reminded that all this has been brought about by a sense of duty and everlasting responsibility. When you visit the quadrangle of the Royal Exchange, stop and view the monument raised to commemorate a stirring event of the past, and let the words written on the scroll be indelibly impressed upon your hearts and minds.

That England, the United Kingdom,  
Yea, the whole world,  
Expects that every man will  
Do his duty.



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